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ABSTRACT

The Real Game is a Canadian career education simulation for 12- and 13-year-olds that is currently being adapted for the United Kingdom. The game emphasizes the following five main messages: remember that change is constant; understand that learning is ongoing; focus on the journey; follow your heart; and access your allies. The game's effectiveness in the United Kingdom was examined in a national pilot study that used the following four data collection activities: interviews with senior managers in 12 schools; questionnaires sent to teachers from all 37 pilot schools; pupil interviews; and data sets for 1,005 pupils at 16 schools (546 who participated in the game and 559 who formed a comparison sample). Although most schools used the game for an average of only 12 hours, most teachers considered the game valuable for students in its target age group, and reported that it had a relatively high rate of impact on pupils' learning. Pupils held broadly positive views of what the game taught them. Those who participated in the game showed significant gains on knowledge items and small gains on career beliefs; however, measures of "employability beliefs," self-efficacy for job exploration, occupationally relevant self-awareness, and career planning failed to show gains relative to the comparison sample. (MN)

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NICEC

Briefing

ED 438 437

# The Real Game

## EVALUATION OF THE UK NATIONAL PILOT

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"Too little, too late and too narrow" is a traditional criticism of Careers Education in secondary schools. Studies in recent years have confirmed the value of promoting career-related learning in early secondary and primary education. Interest has grown in finding approaches and activities which will work with younger pupils. The Real Game is a Canadian teaching programme for 12/13-year-olds which is currently being adapted for the UK.

This Briefing:

- outlines the history and content of the game;
- describes a qualitative evaluation offering insights into the teaching and learning processes involved;
- presents quantitative data providing objective evidence of learning gains;
- discusses implications for future practice.

The Briefing is based on an evaluation study undertaken by NICEC for DfEE. It has been written by Anthony Barnes, Andrew Edwards, John Killeen and Tony Watts.

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# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY

The Real Game is a careers education simulation for Year 8 pupils designed to help 12/13-year-olds to explore careers and the world of work in an enjoyable, relevant and meaningful way. Developed originally in Newfoundland, Canada, it has been implemented in schools across Canada and the USA. During 1997, interest grew in the possibility of introducing The Real Game in the UK. Kent Careers Services piloted a shortened version of the game in a small group of schools in two phases (1997-99) and managed a national pilot for DfEE in 1998/99. NICEC was invited to evaluate both Kent pilots and the national pilot. The findings of these evaluation studies have contributed to the development of the first UK version of The Real Game which will be launched early in 2000.

## THE GAME

The Real Game's main messages are:

- change is constant;
- learning is ongoing;
- focus on the journey;
- follow your heart;
- access your allies.

Pupils assimilate these key ideas by taking on a job role which they are assigned at random. They imagine what it is like to have the qualifications, transferable skills, salary and leisure time which go with that job. The game requires them to set up small neighbourhood communities in which they experience balancing their personal budgets, planning a holiday which they can afford and coping with redundancy. Alongside the role-play, pupils investigate gender-equality issues and the changing world of work. They play 'The Spin Game' to find out more about the career relevance of the subjects they are studying. Individually, pupils complete a World of Work Questionnaire at the beginning and end of the game to see how their knowledge and opinions have changed. The impact of the game can be enhanced by involving adults from the real world – for example, through staging a career day.

The game requires 25-30 hours of curriculum time depending on the topics chosen and any local adaptations made.

## EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation was in two parts:

- The qualitative part of the study included interviews in 12 schools with senior managers who had agreed to pilot The Real Game, and with teachers and careers advisers who had implemented the programme. Questionnaires were also sent to teachers from all 37 schools in the pilot, as well as to each participating careers service.
- The quantitative part of the study involved an analysis of pupils' views of what The Real Game had taught them. In addition, a quasi-experimental examination was conducted of the game's effects on pupils' career-related beliefs and knowledge. Sixteen schools provided data-sets for 546 pupils who participated in the game and 559 pupils who formed a comparison sample. The instruments used were a modified version of The Real Game's World of Work Questionnaire, plus a supplementary questionnaire with additional items.

# THE QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

The field trials had an important limitation. Most schools averaged only around 12 hours of delivery time. The findings, therefore, relate to a partial implementation of The Real Game, not to the full programme as intended by its designers.

Nevertheless, most schools were positive about The Real Game and planned to run it again next year as part of their Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme. Teachers considered that the game was well-suited for use with Year 8 pupils (though some also experimented with use in Years 7, 9 and 10). It was seen as making an important contribution to Careers Education for an age-group where previously there had been little or no activity. In addition, teachers were generally positive about the game's potential to develop pupils' skills and knowledge relevant to PSHE and other subjects such as English, Drama, Mathematics and Geography. Its relevance to Citizenship and its potential to enhance particular Key Skills were also acknowledged.

Enjoyment of The Real Game and the achievement of worthwhile learning outcomes were not automatic. Certain stages in the game, such as the allocation of job roles, the budgeting and the announcement of redundancies, were thresholds which could either lift or depress pupil engagement and interest.

## CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

The successful management of The Real Game involved:

- anticipating and dealing with the curriculum and timetabling demands of the game;
- identifying a co-ordinator for The Real Game and ensuring that they received training to lead and train the team of teachers who would be delivering the game to pupils (see box in next column);
- maintaining good communications between those involved in delivering the game;
- monitoring and evaluating The Real Game to provide evidence of the learning benefits.

The Real Game Co-ordinator should have the responsibility for ensuring that:

- the team teaching the game invests adequate planning and preparation time before starting the programme, and holds regular review meetings during it;
- operational roles and responsibilities are agreed and, where possible, shared between different members of the team;
- plans to involve parents and/or members of the business community are planned in advance of the programme starting;
- good communications are maintained between those teaching the programme, so that issues and concerns can be quickly dealt with and resolved;
- the team understands how The Real Game can help pupils to achieve learning outcomes related to Careers Education, PSHE, Citizenship and Key Skills;
- pupils have the opportunity to record and reflect upon their learning;
- the programme is monitored and evaluated (where possible, in objective and quantifiable terms), with opportunities for pupils to contribute directly to this process;
- senior managers are consulted and involved in the planning process and informed of the game's progress and benefits.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

The successful implementation of The Real Game involved:

- focusing clearly on the learning objectives of each topic;
- using the full range of teaching and learning strategies required by the game;
- being motivated by the ideas and comfortable with the pupil-centred approach;
- making creative adaptations to the game, where appropriate (see Case Example A);
- making use of parents and business and community partners (see Case Example B);
- ensuring that the game proceeds with as few interruptions as possible;
- building in debrief and follow-up activities to encourage reflection and review by pupils.

### *Case Example A*

The teachers asked pupils to think of a realistic situation in which they might meet each other in their work roles in their neighbourhoods. Suggestions included:

- In a lift which breaks down (one of the occupants is a mechanic and repairs the lift; another is a doctor who administers first aid to a further occupant who hurt himself when the lift suddenly stopped).
- At a protest meeting.
- In a pub quiz team.
- In a McDonald's outlet.
- In someone's garden (the TV programme maker calls in the building contractor and landscape gardener to carry out improvements on her house and garden).

Pupils then improvised conversations in which they would tell each other things about themselves, derived from the job cards, with the proviso they had to be realistic conversations.

### *Case Example B*

Two parents were invited to talk about their occupational roles, which pupils found very interesting. Both parents stayed throughout the rest of the session and helped groups of pupils with the budgeting activities. This added realism to the activity because the parents were able to talk about the need for budgeting from their own experience. Pupil feedback on this parental involvement was very positive.

## *Outcomes*

Teachers involved in delivering The Real Game in the classroom were asked to assess their pupils' achievement of a range of career-related learning outcomes (see table below). Teachers reported that The Real Game had a relatively high rate of impact on pupils' learning. They identified further learning gains related to the specific objectives of the topic sessions, as well as to objectives in PSHE, Citizenship and (to a lesser degree) Key Skills development.

Some teachers saw the potential for The Real Game to provide an over-arching framework for a PSHE and/or Careers Education programme. The extent of the evidence on career-related learning, together with the extent of the game's perceived coverage of career-related outcomes at Key Stage 3, suggest that there is a case for the game to be used as framework for Careers Education at this level. The parallel case in relation to PSHE, however, is more equivocal.

There was a recognition that The Real Game also raised issues about progression. The impact of the game has a bearing on what precedes as well as what follows it in Careers Education, PSHE and (potentially) Citizenship. There was a desire to see the impetus from The Real Game carried through into later years.

| Area of career learning | Outcome statement | Relevance* |
|---|---|---|
| | *Pupils can:* | |
| Future self | indicate the kind of future they want for themselves | 100% |
| World of work | appreciate how the world of work is changing and how this affects what skills and qualifications they may need | 97% |
| Communication | express their ideas confidently and clearly | 95% |
| Job satisfaction | identify the advantages and disadvantages of different jobs | 95% |
| Financial planning | appreciate how basic budgetary skills can help in decision-making and planning | 92% |
| Self-awareness | explain their basic likes and dislikes | 92% |
| Team work | work effectively in a team | 90% |
| Career planning | appreciate the value in planning for future options and choices | 89% |
| Self-presentation | appreciate the need to present their skills, achievements and experiences in a positive way | 89% |
| Employability | explain what employers are looking for | 86% |
| Equality of opportunity | explain why men and women may be equally suited to the same work opportunities | 82% |
| Lifelong learning | understand the meaning and importance of lifelong learning | 82% |
| Managing change | understand why change occurs and how to deal with it | 78% |
| Careers information | identify the sources of careers information that they may need | 72% |

* Percentage indicating that the Real Game has considerable or some relevance to this objective



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# THE QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

The objective of the quantitative evaluation was to measure pupils' learning in these areas:

- careers information;
- job exploration;
- employability;
- career planning;
- self-awareness.

The approach taken was to assess changes in either or both of:

- self-efficacy, i.e. the levels of confidence that pupils expressed in their ability to perform age-appropriate activities;
- beliefs, i.e. the agreement-disagreement that pupils expressed in terms of the perceived utility of particular activities.

Pupils held broadly positive views of what The Real Game had taught them. Half or more of them said they had learned 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about each of the learning objectives on which they were questioned.

There was clear objective evidence of gains on knowledge and opinions related to the central objectives of The Real Game. Pupils reported that they had learned most about:

- the relationship of qualifications and occupations;
- the advantages and disadvantages of different jobs and occupations;
- sex-typing;
- learning about skills for today's jobs;
- the value of planning for the future whilst still at school;
- how important issues affect communities.

Learning about financial budgets followed quite closely. Many of the items which relate to the objectives embodied in the *process* of the simulation (rather than its *content*) also fell into this range, e.g. listening to others, working with others against deadlines, contributing to discussion.

On average, pupils felt that they had not learned quite so much about employers' recruitment criteria, the impact of technological change on the world of work, self-expression, and the world of work in ten years' time.

There were robust results from the World of Work Questionnaire. Pupils showed significant gains, especially on knowledge items.

In addition, there was a very small gain on career beliefs (in the utility of job exploration, of self-awareness/self-exploration and of career planning), but this was relative to decline in the comparison sample and was inconsistent across schools.

Measures of 'employability beliefs', self-efficacy for job exploration, for occupationally-relevant self-awareness, and for career planning, together with measures of information needs and knowledge of and access to sources of information, failed to show gains relative to the comparison sample. These results may have been affected by the partial implementation of the programme in most schools. Randomised trials of fully-implemented programmes, coupled with alternative methods of measurement, might lead to different conclusions.



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## IMPLICATIONS

Introducing The Real Game into the Year 8 curriculum has implications for schools and their partners.

Senior managers in schools should:

- decide whether they are going to implement The Real Game in full or in a reduced form, and whether they intend to make it a framework for PSHE and/or Careers Education, or to use it as a resource for these programmes;
- ensure that curriculum, staffing and rooming needs are provided for;
- appoint a Real Game co-ordinator who possesses the skills and credibility to lead a team, manage the programme and evaluate the learning yield for pupils;
- ensure that teachers are confident to implement the educational objectives of the game and to adopt the pedagogical style needed to motivate and engage pupils of all ability levels;
- monitor the quality of the programme.

The Careers Service and other partners should:

- provide advice and consultancy to schools to help them address the policy and implementation issues referred to above;
- organise and facilitate access to appropriate training for teachers involved in managing and delivering The Real Game.

Most of the schools in the pilot had plans to improve their usage of The Real Game in the ensuing school year. However, the local pilot in Kent has demonstrated that such intended improvements are not always followed through. Ongoing support is likely to be needed if the full potential of the game is to be realised.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Copies of the full Project Report are available:

Edwards, A., Barnes, A., Killeen, J. & Watts, A.G. (1999). *The Real Game: Evaluation of the UK National Pilot*. NICEC Project Report. Cambridge: CRAC.

Available from NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX, on receipt of an A4 stamped (70p) and addressed envelope.

Also available is a Technical Report containing the details of the quantitative evaluation:

Killeen, J., Edwards, A., Barnes, A. & Watts, A.G. (1999). *Evaluation of the UK National Pilot of The Real Game: Technical Report*. Cambridge: NICEC.

Available from NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX, on receipt of an A4 stamped (70p) and addressed envelope.

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